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Editorial: We can't breathe, either

THE ISSUE

The announcement of no indictment in the chokehold death of Eric Garner.

OUR VIEW

We need leadership from the federal government on this case and those like it.

If only there were video. This was the chorus heard from nearly every quarter in the wake of the Aug. 9 shooting of unarmed African American Michael Brown, 18, by Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson, 28. In fact, this notion may be one of the only points of agreement between Wilson and the Brown family. "Join with us in our campaign to ensure that every police officer working the streets in this country wears a body camera," read a portion of the family's statement Nov. 24 in the wake of the announcement of no indictment. Wilson echoed this sentiment during his first public interview Nov. 25 with ABC News' George Stephanopoulos. "To me it works both sides," he said. "It's going to prove the innocence of police officers when they say it, but it's also going to weed out the bad ones."

But with Wednesday's announcement of no indictment in the July 17 chokehold death of unarmed African American Eric Garner, 43, in New York City, many are now asking: Nothing happens anyway, so what's the point? His death at the hands of Officer Daniel Pantaleo, 29, and a half dozen other NYPD policemen was filmed on the cellphone of Garner's friend Ramsey Orta, 22, from start to finish. The husband and father of six can be heard saying "I can't breathe" no less than 11 times before expiring. The New York City medical examiner ruled Garner's death a homicide Aug. 1. Strangulation in the first degree is a Class C felony in New York. "Members of the New York City Police Department will NOT use chokeholds," reads an excerpt of the 2004 edition of "The NYPD Patrol Guide." "A chokehold shall include, but is not limited to, any pressure to the throat or windpipe, which may prevent or hinder breathing or reduce intake of air." And yet, no one was charged.

The Garner case, unlike Ferguson, has enraged across all political lines. House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, announced congressional hearings on the case Thursday. Former President George W. Bush told CNN's Candy Crowley Friday the Garner grand jury's decision was "hard to understand." According to an Associated Press story we published Friday, Democratic New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has ordered NYPD officers retrained. As with the cases of Brown and Trayvon Martin, Attorney General Eric Holder has announced a federal civil rights investigation into the case.

This outrage must result in action. Most police officers are decent, working class people just trying to get home to their families like everyone else. The result of the Garner case and those like it sullies the uniform and breeds justifiable distrust in the communities they are sworn to serve. We need leadership from the federal government on not just this case, but with police misconduct in general. It's getting harder and harder to breathe.